

## A God of Second Chances

My Father and I were not close. He was much more involved with my brothers than me. They would go on fishing trips, and away for weekends. I was always left with a friend or Aunt. It wasn't until I was in my teens that I was allowed to go along. Turned out I loved fishing. When I could row the boat, I became more useful to him, and he would take me out with him to fish. When I was very young, I remember him hugging me and talking to me but then things changed, and we became distant. When my brothers died and my mother was gone, I was all he had left. I made sure he was taken care of and that he had everything he needed but there was not the affection or closeness that might be expected. When he was in his final years, we would pick him up and take him out for rides. He liked this and seemed to enjoy it. Gradually he began to tell stories of his youth and my grandpa, and about his life. I listened eagerly to these stories but a lot of times the stories would be about my brothers. Sometimes he would voice his regrets. He had signed for my younger brother to go into the army on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. He would pass away 6 months later. My Dad expressed his regrets at this blaming himself for it happening. I was able to assure him that it would have happened anyway. Bill had died of a kidney disease. I told my dad that Bill was given the best care possible in the Army. I didn't know if this was true, but it eased his guilt about allowing him to go into the service. About Frank my oldest brother my dad worried that an ambulance should have been called and he possibly would have been saved. Here again, I assured him that everything that could have been done was taken care of and Frank had been seriously ill for some time. I then told him that I knew how much he loved his sons. He said that he loved me too. It was the first time he had ever said those words to me and in my comforting him, I was comforted. He passed away 3 days later. He had told me many stories in those last months, about his mother's death and that even though he was only 12 years old he had to go out in a severe snowstorm and inform relatives and neighbors. He talked about his father and his skill as a carpenter. I learned more about him in those last few years than I had ever known in the 18 years I lived at home and the 57-years I had known him. We have a God of second chances, and I thank God that I had that chance to talk with and listen to my dad. Our relationship was so much better at the end than it had ever been. I could have remained bitter and angry, but God softened my heart and taught me to forgive, and it gave us both a second chance.

Peter had denied Christ 3 times before the crucifixion but then Jesus rose on Easter Sunday and then appeared to the disciples once again and in John 21:15 we read of Peter's reinstatement:

John 21:15-19 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon's son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes Lord," he said, "You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus said, Simon son of John, do you truly love me." He answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked the third time, "Do you love me?" he said, "Lord you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you to where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Lord, forgive me for all the opportunities I had to forgive my father that I didn't take and I thank you that we had that last opportunity for forgiveness and love. Lord, be with our church, help us to do it better, to reach out to our community and the world. Be with our Pastor, keep him and his family safe, bless his ministry. Be with our staff and leaders, guide them in all they do. May we be a blessing to others and to you. May we be the hands and feet of Jesus as we seek to do your mission here in this time and place. In the name of Jesus, Amen

Grace Epperson